

ABSTRACT**INFORMATION STORAGE AND RETRIEVAL**

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An information retrieval apparatus includes a mapping processor operable to receive data representative of a map of information items from a set of information items identified in a search. The map provides the identified information items with respect to positions in an array in accordance with a mutual similarity of the information items. The map data is arranged to the effect that similar information items map to similar positions in the array. The mapping processor is operable to process the map data to form a hierarchical clustering of information items providing a first clustering level of information items and at least one other clustering level of information items for clusters of information items within the first level clusters. The formation of the information items into clusters in accordance with a hierarchical arrangement facilitates navigation and display of the information items. Furthermore, the mapping processor may provide the first clustering level of information items with a characterising information feature associated with each of the first level clusters of information items. Correspondingly, the display processor may provide a characterising information feature for the clusters of information items within the first level clusters at the other hierarchical level. The characterising information feature provides a facility for distinguishing one cluster from another.

25 Figure 11.